

*This special threat advisory is intended to provide situational awareness of ideologically motivated narratives arising from the Russia-Ukraine conflict (information current as of 1 March 2022, 1000hrs). The IMCIT continues to maintain visibility on emerging threats and will provide updates as required.*

## **SPECIAL THREAT ADVISORY**

### **POTENTIAL FOR IDEOLOGICALLY MOTIVATED CRIMINALITY RELATING TO THE RUSSIA-UKRAINE CONFLICT**

#### **KEY POINTS**

- The Russia-Ukraine conflict is generating discussion within conspiratorial and anti-public health order online networks, underscoring the possibility for such spaces to become fertile ground for disinformation to influence Canadian perspectives on this issue.
- QAnon-like conspiracies are circulating about the conflict, with some claiming that Russian forces will uncover evidence of the “deep state” during its invasion of Ukraine. Some narratives portray Russian forces as liberators, rather than invaders. The degree to which these sentiments represent actual support for the Russian government or its actions against Ukraine, as opposed to reflexive opposition for Western governments’ policies writ large, remains unknown.
- Competing narratives surrounding the conflict may exacerbate divisions in Canadian communities. There is a possibility that protests in support of Ukraine may be met with counter-protest actions inspired by pro-Russia narratives circulating in conspiracy-based networks.
- As public order events occur outside Russian and Ukrainian embassies, consulates, and other landmarks in solidarity with Ukraine, there is a possibility that supporters on either side of the Russia-Ukraine conflict may engage in acts of violence or criminality in Canada. At this time, two acts of vandalism and two reports of damage to vehicles are being investigated as possible hate crimes relating to the conflict.

#### **BACKGROUND**

On 24 February 2022, Russian forces launched an invasion of Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> In response, Western nations, including Canada, began imposing economic and diplomatic sanctions against Russia, as well as delivering lethal aid to Ukraine.<sup>2</sup>

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Misinformation and disinformation associated to conspiracy-based<sup>3</sup> and anti-public health order<sup>4</sup> ideological movements are circulating amongst Canadian social media networks, and are believed to have been promoted by Russian-allied actors. Such narratives are concerning as they may fragment communities by promoting divisiveness in Western democracies.

Commentary on international conflicts not relating specifically to the pandemic or public health restrictions in other countries also marks a shift in the rhetoric espoused by key influencers in the anti-public health order movement in Canada. However, discussion of international politics across social media platforms is expected given the Russia-Ukraine conflict is currently dominating news coverage.

## OVERVIEW OF QANON

QAnon is a conspiracy-based ideological movement centering on allegations from an anonymous persona using the online moniker “Q” and self-identifying as an American political insider. “Q” alleged that an international conspiracy led by the so-called “deep state” is responsible for controlling key aspects of global events with the ultimate goal of stripping people’s rights and freedoms as part of the imposition of a “New World Order”.<sup>5</sup> At the core of QAnon-based narratives are anti-authority sentiments alleging that government institutions, mainstream media, and international governmental and non-governmental organizations are run by an elite class that conspire to manipulate and control the average person.

Former US President Donald TRUMP is seen as the movement’s savior, believing that he would uncover and dismantle the “deep state” conspiracy during his time in office. Of note, TRUMP’s presidential election campaign in 2016 was the subject of a Federal Bureau of Investigation probe examining potential links to Russian-backed interference<sup>6</sup>, and TRUMP often publicly sided with Russian President Vladimir PUTIN during his time in office.<sup>7</sup>

Soon after the US General Election in 2020, the “Q” persona abruptly ceased online activity, but its popularity continued during the pandemic, when public health restrictions such as lockdowns, masking rules, and vaccines were framed by QAnon supporters as attacks on people’s freedoms by “deep state” institutions.<sup>8</sup> QAnon conspiracies have evolved and become enmeshed with other movements, including ideologies in anti-public health order, sovereign citizen, anti-government, and some racially motivated and ethno-nationalist spheres.<sup>9</sup> While most conspiracy narratives no longer reference “Q” specifically, many continue to use QAnon terms such as the “deep state”, “New World Order” and “Great Reset.”

## CURRENT STATUS

QAnon-like conspiracies are circulating about the Russia-Ukraine conflict in Canadian social media networks, with some claiming that Russian forces will uncover evidence of the “deep state” during its invasion of Ukraine. Some narratives portray Russian forces as liberators, rather than invaders. As examples, two Canadian-based movements that have largely focused solely on anti-public health order narratives in the past have recently made statements in support of Russia.

- The self-described leader of the “Kingdom of Canada”, who often espouses QAnon rhetoric to order followers to disobey public health restrictions, proclaimed recently that *“there shall be ZERO*

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*financial or economic sanctions against Russia.”*<sup>10</sup> The leader also posted a video statement in which she alleges there is no war in Ukraine and that media coverage about the conflict is due to “deep state operatives” using mainstream media to start a war and blame Russia. The leader then claims that Russia is liberating Ukraine.<sup>11</sup>

- “The Line Canada”, an anti-public health order group, recently posted to Twitter: *“Do not allow Neo Nazi to take power, a message from Putin to the army. If you are aware, Ukraine is a strong hold for the deep state and NWO [New World Order]. Putin is attacking the deep state and NWO. The media has been manipulating you for the past three years, do not believe them now.”*<sup>12</sup> This tweet has since been deleted, however, this group continues to share rhetoric referencing QAnon-linked conspiracies associated to Russia and Ukraine.<sup>13</sup>

An American public figure, formerly President Donald TRUMP’s chief strategist who has regularly promoted conspiracy theories,<sup>14</sup> also recently came out in support of President PUTIN on a podcast, specifically celebrating the country’s “anti-woke” culture of intolerance towards members of the LGBTQ+ community.<sup>15</sup> Anti-LGBTQ+ sentiments were echoed in statements about the conflict by the leader of another Canadian ideologically motivated online community, who criticized tolerance towards marginalized communities for allegedly weakening Western nations.<sup>16</sup>

The degree to which these statements represent actual support for the Russian government or its actions against Ukraine, as opposed to reflexive opposition for Western governments’ policies writ large, remains unknown.

## BROADER CONSIDERATIONS

Following “Freedom Convoy 2022” events across the country, communities are continuing to grapple with social divisiveness.<sup>17</sup> Narratives relating to the Russia-Ukraine conflict being promoted in spaces previously devoted to anti-public health grievances and conspiracy theories may stoke further division within Canada. These narratives also underscore the potential for foreign interference to influence Canadian perspectives on international conflicts via ideologically motivated spaces of discussion.

While it is unknown whether these recent comments espoused by Western figures are directly linked to Russian-allied interference, it is likely that conspiracy-based narratives will continue to promote rhetoric in favour of Russian military actions as these narratives have, in the past, referenced Russian state media to corroborate conspiracy theories.<sup>18</sup> It is also possible that conspiracy-based adherents may promote narratives that describe efforts by other nations to impose sanctions or intervene in the conflict as part of a grand conspiracy to protect the deep state. The end result will serve to sow division in Western nations.

Public order events outside Russian and Ukrainian embassies, consulates, and other landmarks have occurred nationally<sup>19</sup> and internationally<sup>20</sup> in solidarity with Ukraine. It is possible that these events may be met with counter protests organized by conspiracy-based or ideologically motivated actors, although the IMCIT has no information about such activities taking place in Canada at this time. There is also a possibility that supporters on either side of the Russia-Ukraine conflict may engage in acts of violence or criminality in Canada. One reported vandalism at a Ukrainian bakery in Toronto<sup>21</sup>, one reported

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vandalism at a Russian Orthodox Church in Calgary<sup>22</sup>, and two reports of damages to vehicles displaying Ukrainian flags<sup>23</sup> are currently being investigated as possible hate crimes.

The IMCIT continues to maintain visibility on such emerging issues which may pose a threat to public safety or officer safety and will provide updates as required.

*Issued by: Ideologically Motivated Criminal Intelligence Team (IMCIT)*

*Approved by: Director, Directorate of Strategic Intelligence, Federal Policing National Intelligence*

<sup>1</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/8641948/ukraine-russia-putin-war/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/24/timeline-after-months-tensions-russia-attacks-ukraine>

<sup>3</sup> <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-election-qanon-cyber-idUSKBN271181>

<sup>4</sup> <https://disinfowatch.org/russian-state-media-fueling-canadian-anti-vaccination-and-anti-mask-movements/>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/sep/20/the-qanon-conspiracy>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.justice.gov/mwg-](https://www.justice.gov/mwg-internal/de5fs23hu73ds/progress?id=2nHVMUbo7nEBEW2ST9txQ378rj6usgd1xEwff7kiqLw,&dl)

[internal/de5fs23hu73ds/progress?id=2nHVMUbo7nEBEW2ST9txQ378rj6usgd1xEwff7kiqLw,&dl](https://www.justice.gov/mwg-internal/de5fs23hu73ds/progress?id=2nHVMUbo7nEBEW2ST9txQ378rj6usgd1xEwff7kiqLw,&dl)

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/02/23/trump-politics-russia-ukraine-intertwined/>

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-features/qanon-anti-vax-covid-vaccine-conspiracy-theory-1125197/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://abcnews.go.com/US/wireStory/report-conspiracy-theorists-fuel-bump-extremist-killings-82900165>

Personal Info. [REDACTED]

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xbgA6MDHs7I>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.twitter.com/thelinecanada/status/1496884149164068866>

<sup>13</sup> <https://twitter.com/thelinecanada/status/1497000639930511372> ;

<https://twitter.com/thelinecanada/status/1497009663434440714>

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/steve-bannon-five-things-to-know>

Personal Info. [REDACTED]

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<sup>17</sup> <https://www.ctvnews.ca/canada/i-don-t-know-him-anymore-canadians-losing-family-and-friends-over-trucker-protests-1.5793015>

<sup>18</sup> [https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%E2%80%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem\\_08-04-20.pdf](https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/08/Pillars-of-Russia%E2%80%99s-Disinformation-and-Propaganda-Ecosystem_08-04-20.pdf)

<sup>19</sup> <https://ottawa.ctvnews.ca/ukrainian-canadians-rally-outside-embassy-in-ottawa-ahead-of-russian-invasion-1.5794015> ; <https://toronto.citynews.ca/video/2022/02/24/ukrainians-and-supporters-protest-outside-russian-embassy-in-toronto/> ; <https://globalnews.ca/news/8641194/ukraine-rally-vancouver/> ;

<https://twitter.com/thetidymoose/status/1496993688639229956>

<sup>20</sup> <https://www.aljazeera.com/gallery/2022/2/24/photos-protesters-rally-around-the-world-in-support-of-ukraine> ; <https://www.cnn.com/2022/02/24/photos-show-global-outrage-at-russias-decision-to-invade-ukraine.html>

<sup>21</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/8603474/ukrainian-bakery-vandalized-toronto/>

<sup>22</sup> <https://globalnews.ca/news/8650685/calgary-russian-orthodox-church-vandalism-russia-ukraine-conflict/>

<sup>23</sup> <https://www.cbc.ca/news/canada/toronto/ukraine-police-investigating-1.6367654>